

# critical digest

VOL. III No. 24

February 12, 1951

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

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## New York Openings This Week

King of Friday's Men-Playhouse, 2/14/51. Irish comedy by Michael J. Molloy, produced by Michael Grace and staged by John Burrell. Cast includes Walter Macken, Una O'Connor and Frederick Tozere...The Small Hours-National, 2/15/51. Max Gordon's production of George S. Kaufman and Leusen MacGrath's new play starring Dorothy Stickney and Paul McGrath. Staged by Mr. Kaufman.

## Digests of Current Reviews - more on back page

The Rose Tattoo-Martin Beck, 2/3/51. Slight majority of first night appraisers approved of Tennessee Williams' new folk comedy. Play, which takes an entirely different theme and point of view than Williams' former scripts, was praised for its warmth, humor and affection. Cast of newcomers headed by Maureen Stapleton, Eli Wallach, Phyllis Love and Don Murray received ample applause. Direction by Daniel Mann, production by Cheryl Crawford was deemed excellent. Dissenters included Mirror, Journal American and Post critics. First two found script offensive. But McClain, Journal American, hopes to see the young stars in a play more worthy of their talents. Watts, Post, was very disappointed that Williams' try at something different failed. Hawkins, WT&S, who filed a "so-so" report, thought Miss Stapleton was just short of perfect. Several thought play assures Williams' place in the theatre. Atkinson, Times, summed up point when he called script "the loveliest idyll written for the stage in some time."

The Green Bay Tree-Golden, 2/1/51. Shepard Traube's revival of Mordaunt Shairp's provocative play of 1933 was greeted with a split decision from the daily reviewers. Even those who admired the present production, had to admit the original outshone it in tone, polish and setting. Atkinson, Times, noted that though this version almost side-steps the theme of homosexuality, it still remains an interesting play. Joseph Schildkraut's performance was termed moving by most. Anne Crawford's first Broadway appearance was welcomed. McClain, Journal American, praised script and production, but thought theme was slightly soiled. Dissenters included critics of Mirror, Post, WT&S, Eagle and Women's Wear. Every aspect of the production was wrong, commented Watts, Post. He thought that only Francis Compton knew what play was about. Sheaffer, Eagle, placed blame on director while Dash, Women's Wear, complained that some of Schildkraut's speeches were inaudible. Hawkins, WT&S, was very disappointed that play didn't live up to its buildup.

Darkness At Noon-Alvin, 1/13/51. Four weekly critics panned Playwrights Company production of Sidney Kingsley's adaptation of the controversial Koestler novel. Reasons expressed by Clurmen, New Republic, Kerr, Commonweal, Crisler, Christian Science Monitor and George Jean Nathan were essentially the same. Book to begin with was highly anti-dramatic, no one can sympathize with the plight of the "hero", and the mountains of scenery work against both the cast, headed by Claude Rains, and the script itself.

## Editorial Pros & Cons

"The show must go on" myth probably doesn't seem very convincing to John Emery, young actor who "sprained" his ankle at Richard II City Center opening. He found out later that his ankle was actually broken and that continuing made it worse. In such incidents intelligence must reign over sentiment. "The play's the thing", but the person is more important.

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' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '  
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Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the shows for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

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|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times             | 11. Women's Wear Daily  | 21. Freeman         |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune    | 12. Wall Street Journal | 22. Commonweal      |
| 3. NY News              | 13. Journal of Commerce | 23. Cue             |
| 4. NY Mirror            | 14. George Jean Nathan  | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass           | 15. Ward Morehouse      | 25. Sat.Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post              | 16. Morning Telegraph   | 26. Newsweek        |
| 7. NY Journal American  | 17. Variety             | 27. Time            |
| 8. World Telegram & Sun | 18. Billboard           | 28. Nation          |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle       | 19. Theatre Arts        | 29. New Republic    |
| 10. Newark News         | 20. New Leader          | 30. New Yorker      |

ANGEL IN THE PAWNSHOP-Booth, 1/18/51. Pro: 3-6-8-10-11-12-13-18-30.  
Con: 1-2-4-5-7-9-15-17-23-26-27.

AFFAIRS OF STATE-Music Box, 9/25/50. Pro: 2-3-4-5-7-8-13-17-18-27-30.  
Con: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29.

BLESS YOU ALL-Hellinger, 12/14/50. Pro: 15 votes. Con: 1-5-10-11-14-15-17-18-22-27-29.

BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE-Barrymore, 11/14/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 2-6-15-17-19-20-21-22.

CALL ME MADAM-Imperial, 10/12/50. Pro: 23 votes. Con: 18-19-28-29. So-So: 3.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 1-8-12-20-22-25-29. So-So: 14

THE COUNTRY GIRL-Lyceum, 11/10/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 4-8-14-27-28-30.

DARKNESS AT NOON-Booth, 1/13/51. Pro: 2-3-4-6-7-8-9-10-11-15-18-19-27-30.  
Con: 1-14-17-22-24-26-29. So-So: 5-12-13-23.

GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-Ziegfeld, 12/8/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-28. So-So: 14-18-22.

GUYS AND DOLLS-46th St.Theatre, 11/24/50. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 28. None: 18-21.

THE HAPPY TIME-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 5-6-15-19-26-27-28-30.

KISS ME KATE-Shubert, 12/31/48. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 29. None: 28.

THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING-Royale, 12/8/50. Pro: 22 votes. Con: 3-11-29. So-So: 17-30.

THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 25 votes. Con: 14. So-So: 27-30.

OUT OF THIS WORLD-Century, 12/21/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-8-10-11-13-23-29-30.  
Con: 1-3-9-12-17-18-19-20-22-24-26-27. So-So: 2.

PEEP SHOW-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-9-10-13-15-16-18-23.  
Con: 1-2-11-14-19-26-27-28-29-30. So-So: 3-12-17.

SEASON IN THE SUN-Cort, 9/28/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 9-11-20-24-28. So-So: 10.

SECOND THRESHOLD-Moresco, 1/2/51. Pro: 14 votes. Con: 4-9-13-14-17-18-23-27-28.

SOUTH PACIFIC-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-11-13-16-17-18-19-24-25-26-30.  
Con: 27. So-So: 23.

TWENTIETH CENTURY-Fulton, 12/24/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 5-24-28.

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' Green Room Department '

REGULATED ENTRY...Controversial plan to cut down number of unqualified people engaged in acting profession suggested by British trade paper Stage. System would have prospective actors attend recognized academy of acting and a reputable repertory company for a period before being allowed to enter Equity. Thus society playboys would be discouraged, and a higher level of acting would be insured.

DIRTY COSTUMES...Filthy condition of most costumes in long run Broadway musicals deplored by Watt, News, who suggested Board of Health might check situation. Contracts provide that costumes shall be cleaned once a month.

BASIC BOOKS...From the thousands of drama books available Peter Wolfe, Theatre News Letter, picked several he considers basic. Comment and alternate lists are invited. His included: World Drama, New Theatres for Old, the Stage Is Set, A Companion to Shakespeare Studies, The Playwright, On the Art of the Theatre, Representative Actors and Macready's Diaries.

REVIEW COPIES...Jay Carmody, Washington Star, agrees with recent CD editorial on free review copies of verse plays. The principle should be that the critic shouldn't have a head start on the playgoers. But he still was glad to have copies of the Fry and Eliot plays before he had to review them.

FEWER REVIVALS...Council of Living Theatre urged by George Jean Nathan to encourage production of more new plays and less revivals. Most revivals this season resembled corpses more than elements of the living theatre. A good new musical will instill more love of the theatre in a youngster than an old dramatic revival. Nathan last year listed six good new plays that have yet to be produced.

THEATRE CRYING...Joys of uninhibited sobbing in theatre admitted by Cornelia Otis Skinner in New Yorker informal essay. If the art of the theatre can give us such honest and humanizing means of release, we should welcome it amid the exigencies of a world grown too terrible for tears. John Mason Brown, SRL, was once her companion in sobs at a Palace return engagement of Weber & Fields and Fay Templeton.

STAGE NEWCOMERS...Fearing that most of the newcomers singled out for critical praise will be in Hollywood within the year Watts, Post, nominated as coming stars: Isobel Bigley, Barbara Ashley, Jo Sullivan, Marilyn Day, Doe Avedon, Pat Crowley, Betsey von Furstenburg, and Nan Martin...Morehouse, WT&S, recommended The Rose Tattoo cast members: Phyllis Love, Don Murdock and Eli Wallach.

USO AID...Times editorial urged New Yorkers to donate time and money to the newly formed USO. Checks can be sent to USO, 50 Broad Street, New York 4.

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' Theatre News Round Up '

Theatre News Weekly folds after ten months...Louis Kronenberger, Time, and John van Druten elected to National Institute of Arts and Letters...Ward Morehouse, WT&S, doing article on drama critics for Theatre Time...John McClain, Journal American, escorting Margaret Truman to the first nights...Harold Clurman, New Republic, stymied in attempt to run Equity company in Switzerland...Harold Cohen, Pittsburgh Post Gazette, to start Mr. & Mrs. program over KDKA...Playwrights Company okayed Billboard suggestion of offering Darkness At Noon script royalty free to amateur groups.

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' Interview Hi-Lights '  
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ANTHONY B. FARRELL...Angel in the Pawnshop producer and well known Broadway "angel" stated his simple method of investing to WOR Buddy Rogers. He just reads the script, listens to the music and decides if he likes it or not. He figures that his guess is as good as the next. Though critics didn't think much of his current production, he is sure that it will be around for a long time.

MARGARET WEBSTER...Shakespearean director doubts if there is an actual theatre-going habit in America, Variety discovered. She believes that most people go to a hit show because it gives them conversational fodder, not for the sake of going to the theatre. Lack of shows out of town is also killing the theatre-going habit.

SHERRY BRITTON...Burlesque queen turned actress in ANTA's Peer Gynt cancelled her Minsky tour in Nevada to appear in the limited run revival she told MBS Sardi's. To do this she had to take a salary cut of from \$1500 to \$75 a week, but she enjoyed appearing the play.

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' Digests of Current Reviews '  
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Jotham Valley-48th St. Theatre, 2/6/51. Daily reviewers were slightly befuddled on how to cover musical sponsored by Moral Re-Armament, Inc. Limited run production with music and book by Cecil Broadhurst is modern morality play promoting efforts of NRA, which believes that most of the world's problems can be solved by personal moral solutions. All critics noted that show couldn't be compared by usual professional standards. Sole critic to really enjoy evening was Coleman, Mirror, who recommended that talent scouts might find some good actors and a few good songs for recording. Atkinson, Times, filed "so-so" verdict feeling that it might have been success if they stuck to serious theme, and not hoked it up with "entertainment". Several recommended singing by Leland Holland and Illene Godfrey as standouts. McClain, Journal American, was never sure what group was trying to prove. Sheaffer, Eagle, thought music was best part of evening. Sylvester, News, was peeved that he was assigned to show at last minute. He printed interoffice memo to chairman of Newspaper Guild Grievance Committee asking if such treatment was fair.

Peer Gynt-Playhouse, 1/28/51. Limited run ANTA subscription production of Ibsen's classic modernized by Paul Green didn't please critics of Cue, Billboard, Nation or New Yorker. The first three agreed that the poetic fantasy of the original was completely lacking. Prime honors went to set designer Donald Oenslager, not star John Garfield, who most thought wasn't up to the long part. Marshall, Nation, noted that he was typical of many movie actors who cannot sustain a role in the theatre. Gibbs, New Yorker, can't remember having spent as artistically gruelling evening this season. Hobe, Variety, had some minor complaints, but thought ANTA was right in offering it.

D'Oyly Carte Opera Company-St. James, 1/29/51. Though most of the weekly reviewers joined daily colleagues in saluting the limited run offering of the famed Gilbert & Sullivan company, Gabriel, Cue, had two criticisms. He suggested that Gilbert's pokes at 19th century London were a bit dated and he recommended that Garson Kanin be allowed to restage the whole set of operettas. Watt, New Yorker, thinks that it is just possible that the company is nearing the end of its road, and that the present illustrious members of the troupe are the last of their line. Thus, he recommended attendance before the process of disintegration has gone any farther.



